

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Tim Murphy  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Hearing on “Influenza: Perspective on Current  
Season and Update on Preparedness”  
February 13, 2013**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

Today we convene the first hearing of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations in the 113th Congress. I'd like to welcome back the members who served here in the 112th and welcome our new members joining us for 113th.

Today we're here to examine the current flu season and discuss the lessons that will help us prepare for seasonal influenza and pandemics in the future. This committee has investigated into response efforts during previous sessions - last during the H1N1 pandemic in 2009 — and oversight of the agencies involved will remain a priority going forward.

I welcome our distinguished witnesses whose agencies play key roles in the federal government's response to influenza: Dr. Thomas Frieden, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Dr. Jesse Goodman, Chief Scientist at the Food and Drug Administration. I also thank Marcia Crosse, Director of the Health Care Division at the Government Accountability Office, for being here. The GAO has done a number of reports analyzing federal response to seasonal and pandemic outbreaks.

This year's flu season came a little earlier than expected and it looks as though it will have been worse than average. This is particularly true in Southwestern Pennsylvania, which has the highest percentage of seniors in the country outside of Florida. In the Pittsburgh region, this year's flu season has been labeled a “nightmare” at local nursing homes that have taken to restricting visitors and quarantining sick patients. For seniors in Southwestern Pennsylvania and across the country, hospitalization rates and deaths have increased sharply.

Sadly, this season has also taken its toll on the most vulnerable. Through February 2, there have been 59 pediatric deaths.

Today, I hope to hear how the CDC, FDA, and vaccine manufacturers are working together — through development of new medications, better surveillance to prevent shortages, and increased vaccination — to protect the public from deadly flu viruses.

Remember, all of us, should consider vaccination to not only protect ourselves from getting sick, but also our children, grandparents, co-workers, and neighbors. The CDC recommends annual vaccinations for all persons aged 6 months and older, yet less than 50 percent of Americans actually get immunized. Today, I hope to learn what the biggest barriers are to people getting vaccinated and how can we remove them.

Each year a new vaccine is produced and administered to protect against the strains expected to be most prevalent that year. Because of the increased activity this season, many have wondered about the process that creates this seasonal vaccine and whether it can be improved.

Questions have also been raised about vaccine effectiveness. We have heard from government representatives that this year's vaccine has an effectiveness rate of 62 percent—meaning that someone who is vaccinated is 62 percent less likely to see a doctor for the flu than someone who hasn't been vaccinated. To some this might seem low, but we have heard that this is actually within the range of what is expected. How can we improve upon that and what efforts are currently underway in the government and the private sector to ensure that we do?

This year, we have also heard reports of spot shortages of vaccine and certain antiviral treatments. Yet, we know that, overall, vaccine and antiviral supply will still exceed demand. What role did the federal

government play, along with its public health partners at the state and local level, in responding to these supply issues and what can we learn from these efforts going forward?

Finally, I wish to thank the Ranking Member of the Committee, Ms. DeGette. This hearing has been a bipartisan effort and the ranking member and I have been working together on a number of issues. I thank her for her support. As well, I would also like to thank the witnesses: I have had time to meet with representatives from the CDC, and staff also reports to me that all of your agencies have been more than helpful in addressing these complex issues.

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